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SUBJECT: ESTONIA: DCM VISITS WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S
SHELTERS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On December 10, DCM visited the Women's Shelter of Tartu and the Tartu Child Support Center to mark International Human Rights Day and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence. DCM toured both facilities and met staff, psychologists and social workers for discussions on domestic abuse in Estonia, awareness raising and victim services. DCM also identified areas for future cooperation between the Embassy and these centers. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Domestic violence is a problem in Estonia, although the level of violence is in line with the EU average. According to domestic NGOs, one in four women in Estonia has suffered physical, emotional, or sexual domestic violence. The Women's Center of Tartu, which began operating in 2002, was the first battered women's shelter to open in Estonia. The founders of the shelter took action after observing the volume of calls to an Estonian crisis hotline from battered women seeking shelter. During its six years of operation, the shelter has provided services to more than 620 women. Of this number, approximately 40 percent have stayed in the shelter while the rest have utilized legal and counseling out-patient services. The shelter staff indicated that the majority of women they have offered services to are ethnic Estonian. Given the social and cultural divide between Estonians and Russian speakers, one staff member hypothesized that it is possible that Russian women do not think Estonians want to help them.

¶3. (U) In addition to providing services to battered women, the shelter staff also liaises with educators, medical and judicial professionals and law enforcement agencies to raise awareness and sensitivity to the issue of domestic violence. According to the center staff, cooperation with the City of Tartu and various other agencies has improved over the course of the last six years, as have attitudes towards domestic violence within the law enforcement community. The staff credits these changes in attitudes to an increased awareness resulting from their training and public outreach campaigns. DCM discussed with the staff ways in which they could extend their reach even further into the community by utilizing resources like public transportation for advertising.

¶4. (U) Shelter staff shared with DCM the funding obstacles the shelter faces. While the shelter itself is sustained by revenue generated from gambling taxes and assistance from the local municipality, the Tartu domestic violence hotline and other training initiatives are understaffed and underfunded. Shelter staff also noted the lack of a formal domestic violence training module for police and rescue staff as a critical shortage complicating their efforts. DCM offered to have the Embassy's Legal Attaché look for sample domestic violence training materials we could share with the shelter and police contacts.

¶4. (U) The Tartu Child Support Center was established as an NGO in 1995 and like the Tallinn Women's Shelter, was the first facility of its kind in Estonia. Over the course of the past 15 years, the Center has offered direct assistance to more than 5200 children. DCM discussed various projects administered by the Center including the Big Brother, Big Sisters program, training to help at-risk mothers and young abusers break the cycle of child abuse, child sex tourism prevention and training for government officials and law enforcement officers on identification and handling of juvenile victims of abuse.

¶5. (U) According to the staff, a large number of the families they work with come from the Russian-speaking community. As such, shelter staff have targeted several training projects in the border regions of Estonia and in Russia proper, and have cultivated an abuse prevention training partnership with Belarus. The shelter has also facilitated the translation of abuse prevention materials into both Estonian and Russian languages. DCM discussed outreach methods such as displaying materials in airports and boat terminals and, with respect to sex tourism, conducting trainings with travel and tourism outlets.

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